

23 April 2025

Jim O'Callaghan TD
Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration

Lengthy Processing Times for Family Visa Applications

Dear Minister O'Callaghan,

Permits Foundation is a not-for-profit corporate initiative supported by over 40 major international companies and organisations. Last year, the Foundation [commended](#) the Irish government following the announcement that spouses and partners of General Employment Permit holders and Intra-Corporate Transferees were to gain direct work authorisation. This policy was greatly welcomed. International dual career couples are usually highly qualified and seek assurance that they can move as a family unit and continue to work.

However, members of our employer network have indicated that the current processing times for join family visas are untenably long, making Ireland less attractive as a destination for international talent and their family members. The potential beneficial impacts of the updated policy are being significantly undermined by the processing times. Impacted applications include family members of employment permit holders, and family members of Irish, EEA, and UK nationals.

While some join family visa applications are processed by embassies within 12 weeks, applications sent to the visa office in Dublin are taking between 53-92 weeks for the majority of visa categories. This causes great distress to employees separated from their families for extended periods and to those family members wishing to relocate to Ireland.

The average processing times for applications processed by the visa office in Dublin across these categories are as follows¹:

Quoted processing time on the following date:	Join family (Sponsor is in Category B) ²	Join family (Sponsor is an Irish citizen or is in Category A*)	Family Member of EU/EEA/Swiss Citizen	Family Member of UK National	De Facto (unmarried) Partner of Irish National	De Facto (unmarried) Partner of CSEP/HA
09-Jan-25	79 weeks	79 weeks	15 weeks	55 weeks	45 weeks	49 weeks
26-Mar-25	89 weeks	89 weeks	16 weeks	58 weeks	49 weeks	54 weeks
02-Apr-25	90 weeks	90 weeks	17 weeks	65 weeks	50 weeks	55 weeks
14-Apr-25	92 weeks	92 weeks	18 weeks	66 weeks	53 weeks	57 weeks

¹ <https://www.irishimmigration.ie/visa-decisions/>

² Category A and B applications are defined in the family reunification policy document published by Immigration Service Delivery in 2016: <https://www.irishimmigration.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Policy-document-on-Non-EEA-family-reunification.pdf>

The Department of Justice aims to process join family visas within 12 months. For most visa categories, this target is not being met, and processing times are increasing. While Permits Foundation acknowledges a 21% increase in entry visa applications and a 14% increase in join family entry visa applications in 2024 (22,000 total applications received³), the lack of progress regarding join family applications is a significant concern due to the impact on family life.

Permits Foundation notes that in most European countries, including the UK, processing for joining family members, especially of highly skilled international employees, is achieved within three months. Both the EU Intra-Corporate Transferee Directive and the Blue Card Directive state that processing should ideally be done at the same time as the principal applicant or within 90 days if joining later.

Additionally, there may be particular concern regarding family members of EU citizens. Directive 2004/38/EC recommends that delays should not exceed six months. Excessive delays would be disproportionate and inconsistent with the principle of equal treatment under EU law. For non visa required family members of EU citizens, Permits Foundation notes that in Ireland, processing times have remained relatively constant and under this six-month window. However, we understand that for non-EEA visa required family members, processing times can take longer.

Disadvantages Within the Processing System

The extended processing times are leading to disproportionate disadvantages for particular populations:

1. Families Applying Separately

In most circumstances, where families apply at the same time, their applications are processed together, facilitating their ability to relocate to Ireland. However, where families apply separately, applications are often sent to the Dublin visa office for processing, where the team is currently reviewing applications filed on 13 July 2023. There are several reasons why family members may apply separately, including completing jobs in their home country, children finishing school, or ensuring the main employee has obtained adequate housing in Ireland before the family relocates. Subjecting families to extended processing times simply because their personal circumstances have aligned to applying separately is granting them a significant detriment.

Due to the personal impact, there may be concerns around retaining this individual in Ireland. Many within our network are employers with a high proportion of foreign nationals employed. Issues with relocating skilled talent to Ireland (including their family members) due to visa processing times increases the risk that companies that would have considered Ireland, request other hiring locations. We are concerned that this will impact Irish economic growth and future opportunities.

2. Family members of Irish, EEA and UK nationals

For individuals who have the right to reside and work in Ireland without requiring their own immigration permission, the current processing framework creates quite considerable challenges. For Irish nationals, it could take from 53-92 weeks at present for their family member to be able to join them in Ireland. For family members of UK nationals, processing times can take up to 66 weeks to receive a decision. This can delay the Irish, EEA and UK national's relocation or reunification with the family member, leading to an impact on family life, and almost eliminate the benefit of holding one of these citizenships.

³ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-03-20/369/?highlight%5B0%5D=visa>

3. Spouses and Civil Partners

Unmarried partners, historically subject to stringent requirements in Ireland, are actually subject to quicker processing times under the de facto route. However, spouses and civil partners fall into Category A and B and could be subject to almost doubly long processing times. This creates a disparity in how family members are treated, creating the perception of an unattractive or unwelcoming immigration system.

Commitments and Proposed Solutions

Ireland aims to address skills needs so that economic migration policy can keep pace with rapid labour market changes. The long processing times for joining family members put Ireland at a disadvantage. We note that this issue has already been raised in the House of the Oireachtas and that the Irish Government has acknowledged that a remedy is needed. We understand that individual assessments often need to be made, but experiences from other countries show that this need not take the length of time that many families are currently enduring.

The Programme for Government⁴ provided a commitment to invest in quickly processing immigration and visa permissions and referenced an expedited visa option for high-demand sectors. Permits Foundation requests that this is rolled out as soon as possible and extended to include family, as this is a critical component for attracting the best talent to Ireland.

Permits Foundation requests confirmation that reducing family processing times is being considered a priority. We would welcome clarity around the measures being taken and when processing times might be brought within the government's own targets.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Frew
Executive Director, Permits Foundation

CC Neale Richmond TD
Minister of State for International Development and Diaspora

⁴ <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/publications/programme-for-government-2025-securing-irelands-future/>